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***Hayy ibn Yaqzan: Una novela filosófica de Ibn Tufayl***  
**(*Hayy ibn Yaqzan: A Philosophical Novel by Ibn Tufayl*)**

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**Resumen:** Trabajo que aborda el relato filosófico *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, titulado así por el héroe de la historia y escrito por el filósofo musulmán Ibn Tufayl (1105-1185). Fue la primera novela árabe y se anticipó a obras europeas como *Robinson Crusoe*, de Daniel Defoe, y *Emile*, de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, así como al pensamiento de varios filósofos occidentales, incluidos Locke y Kant. Este artículo investiga los temas filosóficos contenidos en la novela, centrados en las cuestiones filosóficas clave de “¿qué podemos saber?” Y “¿cómo podemos saber?” Estas preguntas acompañan al ser humano desde el comienzo de la filosofía y siguen siendo importantes actualmente con un debate tan polémico sobre la veracidad de la experiencia no empírica.

**Palabras clave:** Neoplatonismo. Iluminacionismo. *Marifa*. Orientalismo.

**Abstract:** This is the philosophical tale *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, named after the hero of this story and written by the Muslim philosopher Ibn Tufayl (1105-1185). It was the first Arabic novel, and anticipated such European works as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, as well as the thought of a number of western philosophers including Locke and Kant. This paper will bring out the philosophical themes contained within the novel, centred on those key philosophical questions of 'what can we know?' and 'how can we know?'. These questions have been with us since the beginning of philosophy and continue to be important today with such contentious debate concerning the veracity of non-empirical experience.

**Key words:** Neoplatonist. Illuminationist. *Marifa*. Orientalist.

### 1. The Novel: A short summary

After Ibn Tufayl's introduction to the novel, he tells a story of a remote and uninhabited equatorial island, lying off the coast of India, which neighbours a much larger island that is populated by a people ruled by a king. This king had a sister and, he being the possessive kind, would not allow her to marry without his permission. However, she secretly married someone she loved called Yaqzan ('wide-awake') and she give birth to a son, Hayy ('Alive'), hence Hayy ibn Yaqzan ('Alive, son of Awake')<sup>1</sup>. Afraid that the king would discover the child, she cast the baby into the sea on a raft. This arrived on the smaller neighbouring island. The baby is discovered by a doe, which provides milk for the infant and raises him. The child learned to walk when he was two and, living among the deer, he imitated their habits and mimicked their calls.

The doe dies when Hayy is just seven years of age, but he survives by using his reason. For example, Hayy dissects the doe to find out what happened to her. It is this process of reasoned enquiry, in total isolation from other human beings, that leads Hayy into a journey for ultimate truth. As he grows older, Hayy becomes more reflective and, unlike the animals that he shares his habitat with that remain firmly within the physical world, he begins to question his existence and to speculate upon the metaphysical and in God. By the age of 42, Hayy is able to have a direct experience of God and devotes the rest of his life in retreat from the physical world. This, however, is interrupted when Hayy is 50 years of age by the arrival on the island of Absal, who comes from a neighbouring island to seek isolation from others. When Hayy and Absal meet, being unable to understand each other through a common language and coming from very different environments, nonetheless realise that they both believe in the same God.

### 2. Ibn Tufayl

From the historical records, little is known about Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Abd al-Malik ibn Muhammad ibn Tufayl al-Qaisi al-Andalusi (c.1105-1185), or Ibn Tufayl for short<sup>2</sup>. What we do know is that he was an Andalusian Muslim philosopher, physician, politician, and novelist. He was born in the small Spanish town of Guadix (then called Wadi Ash), which is about 50 miles northeast of Granada, although his name does tell us that he was originally descended from the distinguished Arabian tribe of Qais. At this time, Andalusia was a rich cultural milieu, and Ibn Tufayl was not short of access to

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, previous to this, Ibn Tufayl speculates over the possibility that Hayy ibn Yaqzan could have come into being by spontaneous generation, without any mother or father at all.

<sup>2</sup> In the West, the Latinised name is Abubacher.

philosophers, going back to the Greeks but, more directly, his teacher the Spanish Muslim philosopher and astronomer Ibn Bajjah (Avempace or Avenassar, 1085-1138). He was also greatly influenced by Ibn Sina (Avicenna, c.980-1037), the Aristotelian Muslim philosopher al-Farabi (Alpharabius, c.872-950), and the theologian, philosopher and mystic al-Ghazali (Algazel, 1058-1111).

Ibn Tufayl was minister to the governor of Granada and other members of the Almohad dynasty, achieving the prestigious post of vizier (a chief minister) and chief royal physician to the Almohad Sultan Abu Yaqub Yusuf. The Sultan was something of an intellectual himself and liked to surround himself with scholars and their books. It was Ibn Tufayl who recommended Averroes to Yaqub, and Averroes himself reports of this first meeting:

The first question addressed to me by the commander of the believers, after inquiring about my name, my father's name and my pedigree, was: "What are the philosophers' views about heaven [the world], is it eternal or created?" So abashed and terrified did I feel that I began to offer excuses, even denying that I ever dealt with philosophy. I had no idea then what the sultan-caliph and ibn Tufayl had in mind for me... (Marrakushi, 1881: 174-175)

Averroes' concern is understandable, for to take a side on such doctrinal issues can lead to either royal patronage or banishment, depending upon which answer is given. Fortunately for Averroes, the enlightened Sultan seemed satisfied enough to appoint him as his new physician to succeed Ibn Tufayl when he retired in 1182. It was also due to Ibn Tufayl that Averroes was commissioned to complete the ambitious project of writing commentaries on the works of Aristotle which were to have such an immense influence of philosophy in the West. Ibn Tufayl died in 1185 in Marrakesh and, although he wrote textbooks on medicine and astronomy, as well as poetry, it is his work *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* for which he is predominantly known for.

### **3. Philosophical Context**

When the Arabs conquered Syria and Iraq in the seventh century they encountered a number ancient Greek schools of philosophy there, the most famous being Antioch, Harran, Edessa Nisibis, and Qinnasrin. These centres were largely Christian, with the exception of Harran in Northern Syria, which was the home of a group referred to by the Arabs as Sabaeans; a now-extinct nature-cult who are mentioned in the Quran as worshippers of the Sun. What

these schools did was to translate Greek works, many deriving from Alexandria, into Syriac, and so when the Arabs conquered these lands they were confronted with the task of translating into Arabic works that had been translated into Syriac from the Greek! It is perhaps inevitable that such any translations will result in a certain degree of interpretation, as the Arabs were, on the one hand, confronted with a Neoplatonic Aristotle in Alexandria and, on the other, a Christian Aristotle in Syria; the latter translators not being particularly enamoured with Plotinus' criticism of Christians. The Arab Muslims treated what they found with considerable respect, referring to them as imams. The problem, however, is the extent to which such respect, if not reverence, for the Greeks such as Plato and Aristotle especially needed to be circumscribed when their 'truth' conflicted with the truth of the Quran (Jackson, 2014: 8-21)

It required considerable ingenuity, as well as philosophical and theological rigour to harmonise religion with philosophy, and one of the first to engage in this labour was al-Farabi. He was likely born in the town of Farab in Turkestan and his father was said to have been a military officer in the Persian army, though of Turkish extraction. Al-Farabi believed that the Prophets, including Muhammad, were first and foremost philosophers, for it was true philosophers – as opposed to those with faith – who have access to 'revelation' in the sense of knowledge of God. 'God', for al-Farabi, was equivalent to the Active Intellect, not unlike Plato's conception of the Form of the Good that is 'accessed' through reason. This view of God as 'Active Intellect' is derived from a Neoplatonic conception of God. Al-Farabi's cosmology is also touched by Aristotle's spheres and Quranic references to seven heavenly mansions. It is this blend of Plato, Aristotle, Neoplatonism, and Islamic theology, that led the way in Muslim philosophy and proved to be hugely influential in Ibn Tufayl's approach.

Another important influence, and someone geographically closer, was Avempace. Ibn Tufayl was very familiar with a work by Avempace called *The Hermit's Regime* or *Biography of a Solitary Being* (*Tadbir al-Mutawabbih*<sup>3</sup>) which, in actual fact, continues a discussion that was discussed in its Islamic perspective by al-Farabi in his book, *On The Perfect State* (*Mabadi Ara Ahl Al-Madinat Al-Fadilat*). This debate, in turn, has its origins with Plato who, in the *Republic* especially, considers the role of the philosopher in the state and argues that, in an imperfect state, it is better for the philosopher to pursue a solitary existence. Ibn Bajjah considers the extent to which someone can lead a solitary life and achieve spiritual and intellectual fulfilment (i.e. in Neoplatonic terms, attain

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<sup>3</sup> Ibn Bājja's book has also been translated as *The Conduct of the Solitary*, and *Governance of the Solitary*

union with the Active Intellect). To what extent is society required in order to attain knowledge of truth? Human beings are seen as uniquely self-thinking intellects: at least, almost unique, with one other possible exception; that of God. Human beings have, it seems, this capacity for self-intellection of which the only other parallel is God. Intuitively, being human conjures up an image of something magical, mysterious and special. Human beings are ‘God-like’; we all partake, to some extent at least, in God’s perfection. In a solitary state, with no knowledge of the ‘other’, can one attain self-awareness?

Avicenna, previous to Ibn Tufayl, wrote a much shorter allegorical tale also entitled *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, which, though less poetic than Ibn Tufayl’s version, describes how Hayy arrives at ultimate truths in a virtually self-taught manner. It is a theme that Avicenna explores some more in his thought-experiment the Floating Man whereby he asks the reader to conceive oneself being created at once while floating in mid-air, being completely divorced from all sensations and with no past; no objects to perceive, including your own body. Even in such a state of sensory deprivation, Avicenna argued that one would still have self-consciousness due to the existence of a soul that is independent of sensory experience and the source of truth (El-Bizri, 2000).

Because Hayy was an autodidactic, the Latin title given to this work is *Philosophus Autodidactus*, and the Latin translation, which first appeared in 1671 (the first English translation was published in 1708), proved to be influential in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe in terms of philosophy and literature. Studies suggest that this work inspired Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (Hassan; Haque). In terms of philosophy, the most important influence must have been John Locke (1632-1704) who, in turn, was a massive influence on other Western philosophers. Locke was close friends and a student of the Orientalist and biblical scholar Edward Pococke (1604-1691) and Locke, in turn, became the tutor for Pococke’s son Edward Pococke the Younger (1648-1727), who published the Latin edition of *Philosophus Autodidactus*. As pointed out:

On the basis of all the evidence, the conclusion is inescapable that not only Locke must have known the work [*Philosophus Autodidactus*], but also that he must have been intimately acquainted with the progress of the whole project. Thus the period (1667-1671), during which Locke began to consider the ‘problems’ of the *Essay* [*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*], and put them in writing for the first time, coincides precisely with that of the translation, publication and dissemination of *Philosophus autodidactus* by Edward and Dr. Pococke (Russell, 1994: 246)

ROY JACKSON

In addition, the ideas contained within *Hayy*, if not directly influential, foreshadowed the thought of Hobbes, Hume, Berkeley, and Kant, amongst others.

#### 4. How are we to know God?

One important theme, or question, that comes out of the novel is how are we to know God? More broadly speaking, this is a philosophical question that has preoccupied thinkers since the birth of philosophy, if one is to understand 'God' not only in the strict monotheistic sense as understood by, in this case, Islam, but also in the philosophical sense - with its roots within the pre-Socratic tradition - of the nature of 'Being' and all the epistemological, moral, political, etc., implications that arise from such rigorous discourse. Within the field of philosophy of religion, there is an intellectual engagement regarding the nature of God, whether God exists, and, if He does exist, what does this mean for us as human beings and our relation to such a Being, given the seeming distance between the contingent, mortal, flawed, and fragile being that is Man, and the necessary, immortal, perfect Being that is God.

The problem with such an intellectual engagement is the disturbing realisation that the human intellect proves to be limited in how far it can reach out. One might adopt an empirical approach to this and declare that such questions are meaningless, or question the empirical framework itself and look toward other forms of understanding. The character of Hayy is an account of the evolution of this one man towards an understanding of God, of getting to know God, and Ibn Tufayl makes use of a fictional account for the very reason that communicating what it means to know God is simply impossible: the best one can do is use the medium of fiction - with its many tools of metaphor, imagery and so on at its disposal - to provide the reader with some idea of Being. Such a technique is reminiscent of Socrates in *The Republic* who has no choice but to resort to a series of analogies in order to describe what is meant by the Good. Hence, Ibn Tufayl in his introduction to his work, describes the difficulty:

Your request set off a stream of ideas in me - praise God - which lifted me to a state of sublimity I had never known before, a state so wonderful "the tongue cannot describe" or explain it, for it belongs to another order of being, a different world. But the joy, delight and bliss of this ecstasy are such that no one who has reached it or even

come near it can keep the secret or conceal the mystery.  
The light-headedness, expansiveness, and joy which seize  
him force him to blurt it out in some sweeping generality,  
for to capture it precisely is impossible (Ibn Tufayl, 2009:  
95)

The achievement of ‘ecstasy’, or *hal* in Arabic, reveals the very problem of describing what is indescribable, resorting to an emotional state that gives the human a ‘peek’ behind the curtain that reveals Being. It leaves one ‘light-headed’ and with a feeling of ‘expansiveness’ which are key features of mystical experience that, during the experience itself can be emotionally charging and fulfilling, but can also, once this temporary state recedes, leave us feeling bereft and depressed over our seemingly limited and banal everyday human world. These moments, then, are transient, as William James duly noted and, therefore, leave us craving for more.

Hayy’s craving to know God might well be categorised, then, as a mystical experience, but one is hesitant to label it exclusively in this way, for religion manifests itself in various forms that overlap and, to some degree, hybridise. For example, Islam as a religion manifests itself in a rational sense, and as a series of ritual, dogmas and laws, but its very foundation rests upon the Prophet Muhammad’s ‘mystical experience’ of communicating with God. Whilst there may be no prophets after Muhammad, the belief that such communication, at least to some extent, cannot be ruled out for the believer, raising important questions concerning the limitations of knowledge as well as forms of knowledge. Hayy, for his part, while being no prophet, nonetheless evolves as a human being, or perhaps as a ‘transhuman’, in his experience of God, of Being. As we note from the quote above by Ibn Tufayl, attempting to communicate what this experience was for Hayy will be impossible, and the best one can do is attempt to read in between the lines, rather like reading *Moby Dick* as an allegory for confrontation with God. Consider the account Hayy gives of his experience:

Passing through a deep trance to the complete death-of-self and real contact with the divine, he saw a being corresponding to the highest sphere, beyond which there is no body, a subject free of matter, and neither identical with the Truth and the One nor with the sphere itself, nor distinct from either - as the form of the sun appearing in a polished mirror is neither sun nor mirror, and yet distinct from neither. The splendor, perfection, and beauty he saw



in the essence of that sphere were too magnificent to be described and too delicate to be clothed in written or spoken words. But he saw it to be the pinnacle of joy, delight, and rapture, in blissful vision of the being of the Truth, glorious be His Majesty (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 152)

Once again, Ibn Tufayl is wary of the limitations of language in communicating here, it is 'too delicate to be clothed in written or spoken words' and the emphasis that immediately precedes this description is that 'a hint or a glimpse will be enough to give you some idea of the divine world, and if you can avoid conjuring my words in their ordinary sense' (2009, 152-157) is begging the reader to not take Ibn Tufayl's account literally and that the best that can be offered is a 'hint or a glimpse'; once again a peek behind the veil. To describe God will not fit comfortably within the confines of logical positivism, of 'ordinary language'; we have to make a Kierkegaardian leap and appreciate myth, story and poetry as something more than more than that; a way of expressing the metaphysical, of providing us with a 'hint'. Philosophers, too, are not averse to such techniques. Mention has already been made of Plato, of course, but the brief reference to Kierkegaard is typical of the existential tradition, perhaps no more so than Camus and Sartre, which looks to fiction to express the 'inexpressible', even if that may not be metaphysical in all cases.

The religious experience that Ibn Tufayl describes is an example whereby the faculty of reason fails us and, therefore, the knowledge provided is intuitive. The Arabic term here is *marifa* (literally 'knowledge') and is commonly used in Sufi literature. This debate as to the limitations of reason in philosophy has a long history, both in Islamic philosophy and in the Western tradition. Aristotle may well be considered more empirical than Plato and, while the latter is considered a 'rationalist', his philosophy often verges on the mystical and intuitive when it comes to knowledge of ultimate Reality. Interestingly, in Gauthier's French translation of *Hayy* (Ibn Tufayl, 1992: 91, note 3) he notes that Ibn Tufayl's concern with intuition predates the great Western philosopher Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) own concerns some 600 years later. One of perhaps Kant's strangest of books is his *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. Published in 1776, it is one of Kant's earliest writings and it is 'strange' because it is a strongly sceptical work, evidently influenced by David Hume's empiricism, but it is also written in a style quite different from Kant's other works, being - at times anyway - more playful, ironic and humorous. The 'Spirit-Seer' in the title is Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), the eminent Swedish scientist and statesman who, in 1745 at the age of 57, changed careers to become a theologian and mystic visionary. His most famous work is the eight-volume

*Arcana Coelestia* (*Secrets of Heaven*, 1749-1756), which gives accounts of his journeys through the spirit world where he visited heaven and hell and conversed with angels and demons, all of whom are the departed spirits of human beings or the inhabitants of other planets. The young Kant seems particularly annoyed that he has spent a great deal of money and time on buying and reading these volumes.

Swedenborg holds that the material and spiritual worlds show themselves as two distinct forms of cognition. The material world appears to the senses, whereas the spiritual world is present to an appropriately spiritual form of cognition. Hence the passage from the material to the spiritual worlds is not a change of place but simply a change of one's mode of cognition. Kant's criticism is of Swedenborg, but also of mysticism as a form of cognition, of stretching the realms of epistemology to the mystical realm. Kant sees this as pseudo-philosophy and places Arab culture in this same category. *Marifa*, intuitive knowledge, is not, so far as Kant is concerned, knowledge at all. Kant defines human understanding as 'a small land with many boundaries' (Kant II: 983), and Kant has very specific – European – boundaries for philosophy, and so 'Islamic philosophy' would be a contradiction in terms. Islam is a threat to Kant's realms of reason. For Kant, his Orientalist understanding of Islam sees Muhammad as an over-enthusiastic visionary which results in a religion that lacks reason and, therefore, an ethical theology.

In the same way Kant was critical of the philosopher who went beyond the boundaries of what he understood philosophy to be, the Muslim philosopher and theologian Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058-1111) shared this concern in his *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tabaḥḥut al-Falāsifah*), although it would be incorrect to equate Ghazali's views on intuition with that of Kant. In Ghazali's *Incoherence* he starts his work by condemning the ancient Greek philosophers; that their metaphysical theories are inconsistent. Avicenna and his followers, by essentially following in the footsteps of the ancient Greeks, are committing the same inconsistencies. So 'incoherent' here is synonymous with 'inconsistent': a fault in the logic. In fact, al-Ghazali's fascinating short work *Deliverance from Error* (*al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*) describes his own intellectual crisis, which resulted in him being so paralysed by doubt he was compelled to leave academia:

...I considered the circumstances of my life, and realised that I was caught in a veritable thicket of attachments. I also considered my activities, of which the best was my teaching and lecturing, and realised that in them I was dealing in sciences that were unimportant and contributed

ROY JACKSON

nothing to the attainment of eternal life. After that I examined my motive in my work of teaching, and realised that it was not a pure desire for the things of God, but that the impulse moving me...was the desire for an influential position and public recognition (Watt, 1953: 21)

What followed was a number of years of travelling as a Sufi. He travelled to Syria and Palestine, and made a pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. He led the life of an ascetic, wearing the rough woollen clothing typical of the Sufi, and sleeping in mosques. Through abstinence, self-discipline, prayer and meditation he eventually found the peace of mind that his material success had not provided him, and this work, *Deliverance*, describes how he achieved direct knowledge of God through *marifa*.

This form of knowledge that Hayy experiences, then, is by no means an uncommon experience in Islamic thought. What al-Ghazali experienced is described as 'Illumination' (*Isbraq*) within the Sufi tradition. The 'Master of Illumination' ('Shaykh al-Isbraq') was Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā ibn Habash ibn Amīrak Abu'l-Futūh Suhrawardi (1154-91), or Suhrawardi for short. Suhrawardi was a prolific writer who aimed to bring together Islamic thought with that of Platonic, Neoplatonic and Persian philosophy. Like al-Ghazali, he travelled the Islamic world (rather, amongst the regions of the ruling Seljuk dynasty of the time) in search of knowledge, studying under the great mystic Majd al-Din al-Jili in the city of Maraghah in Azerbaijan and, even when he was appointed to the royal court of the Seljuk princes and rulers, he preferred to adopt the simple woollen attire of the Sufi *kebirqa*.

It is to Suhrawardi we must give credit for introducing to Islamic philosophy the language, the ideas, and the methodology of what is called the Illuminationist school, which is perhaps more traditionally (though somewhat unhelpfully) also referred to as the 'Oriental' school for which Hayy ibn Yaqzan is very much a part of, as Ibn Tufayl introduces the narrative:

Noble brother, my dear, kind friend, God grant you eternal life and everlasting happiness. You have asked me to unfold for you, as well as I am able, the secrets of the oriental philosophy mentioned by the prince of philosophers Avicenna (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 95)

Yet Suhrawardi was writing in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Seljuk territories which was imbued with mystical, eastern, Oriental thought, whereas Ibn Tufayl,

though a contemporary of Suhrawardi, who was within an Andalusian milieu and, therefore, a 'Westerner', was making a conscious endeavour to introduce Eastern thought to the West as something that is not simply a product of Greek philosophy.

...before the spread of philosophy and formal logic to the West all native Andalusians of any ability devoted their lives to mathematics. They achieved a high level in that field but could do no more. The next generation surpassed them in that they knew a little logic. But study logic as they may, they could not find in it the way to fulfilment...our own contemporaries, are as yet at a developmental stage, or else their development has halted prematurely - unless there are some of whom I don't yet have a full report (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 99-100)

One major worry for so many theologians especially, al-Ghazali included, was that Greek philosophy threatened to dilute what is Islamic, and Ibn Tufayl want to make a distinction between '*falsafa*', what he saw as the philosophy that is more directly influenced by Plato and Aristotle especially, and what he called his 'peripatetic philosophy' as *hikmat-ul-mashriqiyya*. *Hikmat* is Semitic for 'wisdom', and *mashriqiyya*, with its root *sh-r-q* related to '*isbraq*'; Suhrawardi's Illuminationism. The term *mushriqiyya* means largely the same thing, though Ibn Tufayl was substituting the 'u' with an 'a' to give his philosophy a more geographical location in the West.

However, even Ibn Tufayl's *mashriqiyya* is not so unadulterated, for Suhrawardi's Illuminationism sought to bring together Islamic thought with that of Platonic, Neoplatonic and Persian philosophy. Certainly when we come back to the original question at the beginning of this section, how can we know God?, the so-called Oriental philosophy is influenced by Neoplatonic emanation, although Neoplatonism is, in turn, something of an eclectic school of thought with its roots in Persian and Indian philosophy as much as Greek thought. To 'know' God involves climbing up in the hierarchy of emanation. Given that Mankind - as part of the word of matter - is extremely low in this hierarchy, then He has a steep ladder to climb. However, Neoplatonism offers some optimism in that Man is not purely matter, but possesses a soul which has a 'spark' of the 'light' that is Being. We can see why the term 'Illumination' is used, given these references to 'light' as equivalent to knowledge, which is also reminiscent of Plato's analogy of the sun in the *Republic*. Darkness, on the other hand, represents evil and ignorance.

### 5. Hayy's Evolution

Suhrawardi's concept of the soul is very Platonic, seeing its natural home as belonging in the immaterial world of pure light, but, when the soul enters the material body, it nonetheless yearns to return to its original source. The human being, as represented by Hayy, is, therefore, fulfilling his or her natural function by purifying the soul so that it can return to the immaterial world; this is Hayy's 'evolution' from the human to the transhuman. The evolution of the soul is the task of the philosopher in Hayy, resulting in self-awareness, the 'death-of-self and real contact with the divine' as described in the quote above by Ibn Tufayl.

This self-awareness is a form of knowledge in itself, the 'intuition' that Suhrawardi refers to as knowledge 'by presence' (*al-'ilm al-huduri al-ishraqi*) to contrast it with knowledge that is 'acquired' (*al-'ilm al-husuli*). The latter is effectively knowledge obtained through empirical experimentation, rather than the intuitive kind, which is more subjective, and includes dreams, visions, 'flashes' of illumination, and even out-of-body experiences.

However, Ibn Tufayl, though talking of the 'death of self', is also keen to avoid the more ecstatic, drunken Sufism of self-annihilation (*fana*) at the complete expense and loss of 'acquired' knowledge. Recall Hayy's empirical dissection of the doe, which suggest that it is one, but important, stage in the evolution of Hayy's educational development. The novel is as much concerned with human fulfilment and how one can learn to be human, than it is with knowledge of God and, of course, the two are inseparable. Once more, this is in line with Plato's views on the education of the philosopher, especially with his famous line analogy in the *Republic* whereby an understanding of the physical, and the importance of one's environment, seems to be a necessary stage in the ladder towards knowledge of the Good. Ibn Tufayl describes Hayy's educational development in seven stages of seven years each, which is symbolic of human growth.

Stage one, from birth to the age of seven, is one of dependence upon the doe, and so Hayy's 'self' is yet to be developed or separate from that of the 'parent'. 'She brought him to water when he was thirsty; and when the sun beat down she shaded him.' (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 109). But Hayy starts to realise that he is not like the other deer; he has no fur to keep him warm, or antlers to defend himself.

In the second stage he becomes more self-aware and independent, making clothes to hide his nakedness (hence the self-awareness that he is naked) and learning to make weapons to defend himself. In this way, Hayy became different from the other deer in his attire and habits, to the extent that the deer began to fear and avoid him, with the exception of his parent, but ageing, doe.

He also became the carer for the ageing doe, rather than the cared-for. When death came to the doe, Hayy was overwrought with grief and, 'Certain that the organ where the hurt had settled must be in her breast, he decided to search for and examine it. Perhaps he would be able to get hold of the hurt and remove it.' (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 113). There is also an awareness that the 'being' that had been his parent seemed something much more than the physical presence of the dead doe before him.

In the third stage, his teenager years, Hayy becomes more spiritual as he begins to have visions of the soul. In Suhrawardi's terms, Hayy is now moving up the ladder from the 'acquired' knowledge to the more intuitive knowledge 'by presence'. The Illuminationist emphasis on 'light' becomes more prominent in the tale, as Hayy discovers fire but sees it not only in the purely utilitarian sense of providing warmth, light and food, but in the more 'spiritual' sense to the extent that Hayy practically worships it.

His new infatuation with fire, based on its power and all its beneficial effects, gave him the notion that what had abandoned his doe-mother's heart was of the same or similar substance. The supposition was reinforced by his observation that body heat in animals was constant as long as they were alive, but they grew cold after death...By this time it was plain to him that each animal, although many in respect of its parts, its various senses and types of motion, was nonetheless one in terms of that spirit which stems from a single fixed place and diffuses from there to all the organs (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 117)

Hayy's discovery here is what Aristotle referred to as *psuche* (Latin *anima*), frequently translated as 'soul', and a concept familiar to Islamic philosophers, including the Aristotelian Avicenna, for whom Ibn Tufayl is similarly following in his thought here.

The fourth stage is filled with wonder and opportunity for the young Hayy who sees the world in its variety. By the age of 21 Hayy is now dressed in the skins of animals and has even made his own shoes. He had dissected many animals and learned their nature, and by studying the habits of other animals he imitated them in, for example, building a food store like the swallows. He also engaged in farming, keeping livestock, and so moved from the hunter-gatherer stage, and tamed horses so he could ride them. But, aside from all these practical, day-to-day engagements, it is a time of Cartesian 'soul-searching', of asking questions, of seeking answers. In Platonic terms he is now starting to see

ROY JACKSON

the Forms, but has yet to reach the ultimate Form of the Good: the prisoner has finally left the cave but is yet able to stare at the sun.

He was now anxious to learn all he could about the soul. Turning his thought in this direction, he started off by going over in his mind all physical objects, considered not as bodies but as having forms from which emerge their distinguishing characteristics...Clearly the acts emerging from forms did not really arise in them, but all the actions attributed to them were brought about through them by another Being (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 124)

In the fifth stage, now 28 years of age, Hayy begins to find answers to questions concerning the physical world through the powers of human reason, yet he also becomes aware of reason's limitations. His thoughts turn to what are essentially classical arguments for the existence of God, for example:

For he saw that if he assumed that the universe had come to be in time, ex nihilo, then the necessary consequence would be that it could not have come into existence by itself, but must have had a Maker to give it being (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 131)

From reflecting upon God in the abstract - as Cause and Maker - Hayy then moves to His attributes, that He is good and merciful. Through the human capacity to reason and reflect, Hayy reaches the limit of one's knowledge of God.

Yet there is 'something missing', something deeper that reason perhaps opens the door to further possibilities, but does not provide full access. It is with the sixth stage, at the age of 35, that Hayy seeks for wisdom beyond reason and appreciates the importance of the emotions, so often neglected or considered an encumbrance by the rationalist philosophers. Hence Hayy learns to love God and to have a passion for him. The picture of the soul presented here is both Platonic and Cartesian: Hayy, realising that his apprehension of God as an uncaused, non-physical, eternally-existing Being could not have derived from the human senses which could only grasp what is physical and contingent:

Hearing catches only sounds which are generated by the vibrating waves of air when bodies strike together. Sight knows only colors; smell, odors; taste, flavors; touch,

textures - hard or soft, rough or smooth. Imagination too can apprehend only things with length, breadth and depth. All these are qualities predictable only of physical things (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 135)

Some half a century later, this is not dissimilar from what is referred to as Rene Descartes' (1596-1650) Trademark Argument:

[S]ince I am a thinking thing and have some idea of God, whatever cause is eventually assigned to me, it must be agreed that it is a thinking thing, and that it includes an idea of all the perfections that I attribute God (Descartes, 2000: 43)

As God is non-physical, the 'faculty' for which he perceived must also be non-physical:

The only way to apprehend Him, then, must be by some non-physical means, something which is neither a bodily faculty nor in any way bound up with body - neither inside nor outside, neither in contact with it nor disjointed from it (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 135)

Plato's Socrates gives his account of the soul as trapped within a physical body. The role of the philosopher, then, is to become 'enlightened'; for his soul to 'return' to the realm of the Forms for which it yearns for so much. In this way, the philosopher need not fear death of the physical body. However, for the soul that is preoccupied with, and distracted by, the physical world, the soul will return in another physical body, as Socrates says in Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*, '...true philosophers make dying their profession, and that to them of all men death is least alarming.' (Plato, 2003: 67e).

Similarly, Hayy surmises that the human has three fates open to him. Firstly, if he or she has no knowledge of God (in Platonic terms, the Form of the Good), then at the death of the body the soul also remains ignorant (for Plato, the soul would return to another physical body, not necessarily human). Secondly, if one does have knowledge of God but freely chooses to be preoccupied with bodily pleasures, then the soul will 'endure prolonged agony and infinite pain' (137: 96) (for Plato, once again, the soul to return to the physical realm and continue to yearn to be reunited). Thirdly, if one has knowledge of God and 'turns to Him with his whole being, fasten his thoughts



ROY JACKSON

on His goodness, beauty, and majesty, never turning away until death overtakes him,' then, 'he will live on in infinite joy, bliss, and delight...' (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 138). (For Plato, this is to lead the life of the true philosopher; the life of Socrates.)

This realisation by Hayy is coupled with the concern of *how* is one to 'fasten his thoughts on His goodness, beauty, and majesty, never turning away until death overtakes him'. Suhrawardi tells us that we must engage in ascetic practices in order to receive personal revelations and visions, or what he calls a portion of the 'light of God' (*al-bariq al-ilahi*). Hayy is now at this stage as he purifies his body and engages in ascetic habits.

He would stay in a cave, sitting on the stone floor, head bent, eyes shut, oblivious to all objects of the senses and urges of the body, his thoughts and all his devotion focussed on the Being Whose Existence is Necessity, alone and without rival (Ibn Tufayl 2009: 148)

Consequently, in the seventh and final stage, Hayy moves from acquired knowledge to knowledge 'by presence' through direct experience of God. Ibn Tufayl provides the reader with a wonderful analogy to explain this form of apprehension:

...imagine a child, growing up in a certain city, born blind, but otherwise intelligent and well-endowed, with a sound memory and an apt mind. Through his remaining channels of perception he will get to know the people as well as all sorts of animals and objects, and the streets and alleys, houses and markets - eventually well enough to walk through the city without a guide, recognising at once everyone he meets. But colours, and colours alone, he will know only by descriptive explanations and ostensive definitions. Suppose after he had come this far, his eyesight were restored and he could see. He would walk all through the town finding nothing in contradiction to what he had believed, nor would anything look wrong to him. The colours he encountered would conform to the guidelines that had been sketched out for him. Still there would be two great changes, the second dependent on the first: first the daybreak on a new visual world, and second, his great joy (Ibn Tufayl 2009: 97)

Leaving aside whether it is really possible for a blind person to have any idea of colours at all only through ‘descriptive explanations and ostensive definitions’, the point here is that, whilst one may *describe* what religious belief is, to *experience* it is something else and, importantly, emphasis here is on the emotional state that results, one of ‘great joy’. As Ibn Tufayl continues in the next sentence, ‘Those who merely think and have not reached the level of love are like the blind.’ (2009: 97). What is important here is the emotion of love.

### **Conclusion**

Through spiritual exercises, Hayy, now weary of the physical world, was able to enter the sublime state and stay as long as he wished, with little regard for the needs of the body. Like the philosopher in Plato’s cave analogy, he would return to the depths of the cave, but unwillingly and perceiving it differently, craving for the outside and the sun. The seventh stage comes to an end and Hayy is now 50 years of age. Near to Hayy’s island was another island populated by a people that followed one religion ‘based on the teachings of a certain ancient prophet’ (156:136). Two such followers of this religion were Absal and Salaman who, for Ibn Tufayl, represent two opposite forms of religious expression, whilst remaining adherents to the same religion. Absal was the more ‘spiritual’ and mystical (in Islamic terms, a Sufi adherent), whereas Salaman was more legalistic and literal (in Islamic terms, a strict follower of sharia). Absal preferred the life of solitude, Salaman preferred life in the community of believers.

Absal, desiring for isolation, set sail for Hayy’s island. In time the two met and, despite the fact they could not speak the same language and Hayy had never seen another human being, ‘Hayy had no doubt that he was one of those beings who know the Truth.’ (Ibn Tufayl, 2009: 158). As they grow to know each other and to communicate, what Ibn Tufayl is showing us is that Truth is, by its nature, the same everywhere. Both Hayy and Absal understood each other perfectly in matters of religion, even though both had come from such different environments. However, Hayy was shocked to discover that, for most people on Absal’s island, they are so embedded in their desire for worldly goods that they remain ignorant of the truth, and can only be find guidance through written laws rather than their own personal relationship with God. Through pity for mankind, Hayy, with Absal, sailed to Absal’s island with the intentions of Hayy teaching them what he knew. But, like Plato’s philosopher returning to the cave or Nietzsche’s Zarathustra going down to preach, the people resented Hayy whenever he strayed from the literal understanding of religion. In time, Hayy accepted the fact that most people needed the rituals

ROY JACKSON

and law of religion, and he, together with Absal as his disciple, returned to his own island until their death.

Ibn Tufayl's philosophical novel raises interesting questions concerning what constitutes knowledge that continue to pre-occupy us today. We can see echoes of this debate in, for example, responses to Richard Dawkins' view that only science (and what constitutes 'science') gives us knowledge with that of, for example, some theistic philosophers who argue for the importance of 'personal explanation'. Also, what is shown here is that to make a distinction between 'Western' and 'Eastern' philosophy frequently obscures the fact that the two have always interacted, have asked and, to some extent, answered the same questions.

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